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SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ FEBRUARY 2002

SACRED JOURNEY[®]

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

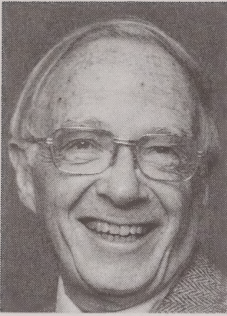
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Cover photo by Abraham Menashe.

THE FOOD OF LOVE



A Native American elder was asked by his grandson why people were fighting all the time. His grandfather answered, "In a vision I saw two wolves at war in my heart. One wolf was snarling and full of rage and violence. The other was loving, compassionate and peaceful.

Between the two of them, I felt I was being torn apart." "Who will win, grampa?" asked the anxious little boy. "The one I feed," said his grandfather.

Which one do you feed more often? It's very hard to resist the wolf of fear, anger, and self-concern on your own. We need the company of others, of like-minded people who can support and sustain us in our faith. We need to pray and meditate in our own home town; in our churches, temples, and mosques; in small spiritual and prayer groups.

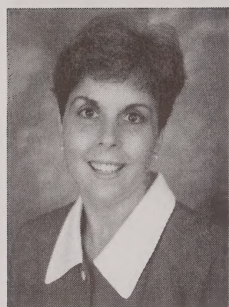
And we need the gathered strength and support of hundreds of such spiritual companions like those you will meet at Fellowship in Prayer's second "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference in Princeton, New Jersey, on June 14, 15, and 16, 2002.

This conference (over 300 people attended our first conference and many more are expected this coming June) will bring you to the pastoral beauty and quiet (and newly air-conditioned gathering spaces!) of Princeton University. Major presentations and workshops will be offered by well-known pioneer of the mind/body connection, Joan Borysenko, and by Jerry May of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. Sixteen other workshop leaders will share with you the ageless wisdom and practices of their own faith traditions.

Paul Rasor, a Quaker whose workshops on spirituality and violence will be a highlight of the conference, tells us that if God is love, compassion and peace, and we have "that of God" within us, then we are called to create relationships and communities where those qualities can flourish and guide our relations.

We think that you will find at the conference the opportunities for the kind of relationships that will feed your own innate desire for love, compassion, and peace. Peace within yourself. Peace with your family and loved ones. Peace with your neighbors and fellow workers. Peace with the whole world and all its sentient beings.

WHISPERS OF TRUTH



Recently I lead a session on prayer for a local clergy group. I spoke briefly about a time when I was at a loss for words and had to let my hands, my feet, my body bent in submission, do my praying. In such a posture, I knew humility—that down-to-earth-truth—of who I am as a beloved but limited child of God. When I finished speaking others began to talk of their own ways of prayer. Mr. Manmohan Singh, a representative of the local Sikh community who immigrated to the United States from India in 1984, described picking up a Bible in a medical waiting room and finding solace in reading a Psalm as well as from his own holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. He said, "I migrated to America because America believes in diversity, freedom, and freedom of faith."

One imam, two rabbis, several Protestant ministers, and a Catholic priest took turns as we began to speak of the simple, intimate ways we turn toward God. Our religious traditions had originated all over the map, but in that short hour, we were all people of deep faith in one place trying to describe the holy moments we know

in our hearts and within our faith communities.

After the meeting, I admitted to Mr. Singh that I knew very little about the Sikh faith. He handed me a calling card. "I will be available to you anytime." A few weeks later, Mr. Singh and I met to talk. After an hour of my asking many questions trying to get a picture of his faith and community, Mr. Singh said, "It will help for you to see the gurdwara, I'll take you there." So we got into his car and made the twenty-minute drive to the white, 8,000 square foot building with decorative arches and many side windows. Our simple conversation follows in *Questions & Answers* and provides a general introduction to the Sikh faith.

Also, in this issue Mary Murphy, storyteller for our June 14-16, 2002 conference, gives a preview in "Old Friends," an unusual Valentine's Day love story. Frequent contributor, Tony Burkart, tells of an encounter with a real, bucket-carrying saint in *Spirituality & Healing*. Nancy Scott tells of a writers' group angel in *A Transforming Experience*. David Prescott takes us on a pilgrimage to Morocco, and Garnette Arledge opens the door so we can tag along at a meditation workshop led by Pir Vilayat Khan of the Sufi Order of the West. Don't miss Frederick Zydek's "Lenten Confession," or Thomas More's description of a moment of divine visitation. He writes, "You leave tracks/Which I trace/Down the open byways and hidden lanes/Until you come again."

Wisdom comes from many lips—often unexpected ones. Somewhere in these pages, I trust, a whisper of truth will move you ever deeper down the labyrinthine tracks of your heart and into that space where each of us truly knows the down-to-earth truth of who we are.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



A Visit to the Sikh Gurdwara

Manmohan Singh

The Gurdwara of the Central Jersey Sikh Association in Washington Township stands in an industrial complex off of Route 130. Completed last spring, the first phase of construction produced a large, white hall with a full-service kitchen and several upstairs guest rooms where people of all faiths in need are given shelter.

A congregation of more than 700 men, women, and children gathers for prayers on Friday nights and Sunday mornings. Many stop in every day, others just on major festivals like the birthdays of Guru Nanak, the founder, or Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the ten gurus Sikhs revere.

There are more than 22 million Sikhs worldwide, and most live in India. An estimated 250,000 live in the United States.

The Sikh religion grew from the soil of the Punjab region of Northern India. The fifteenth-century founder, Guru Nanak, preached loving devotion to God who knows no human form. Guru Nanak urged his followers to meditate on the divine name and anyone who followed his teachings became a sikh, or learner. The fifth guru, Arjun, compiled the early teachings and hymns of the gurus in a book called the Guru Granth Sahib. This holy book is considered the living guru.

Upon entering the building everyone removes shoes and washes hands. Each person, male and female alike, dons head coverings.

Inside the gurdwara, which literally means, "door to the teachers," the holy book rests on a platform at the front of the hall under a canopy. A bedchamber off to the left is reserved for the holy book and a ceremony is held early each morning to bring it to its daily place of honor. The 1,430 page book is then opened to the page following the hymns prayed the previous day. The priest then sings the first hymn of the day.

Throughout the day priests and musicians sing hymns and offer prayers. One approaches the holy book and makes a full-bodied bow. Monetary offerings are laid at the foot of the holy book. At night the holy book is removed, carried on the forehead of the head priest, and placed at rest, as a beloved elder member of the family might be. The holy book is honored as the living repository of the wisdom of the gurus and saints of the ages.

Mr. Manmohan Singh, a senior member of the gurdwara, took Rebecca Laird on a tour and introduced her to the faith he loves.

SACRED JOURNEY: What rituals or services take place here at the gurdwara?

Manmohan Singh: People come to seek peace and return their prayers and make their presence before the holy book. You read the Holy Scriptures called *Guru Granth Sahib*, you can stay for two minutes or two hours. The service starts at 4A.M. and concludes at 9P.M. Not everyone can come every day because we are working people. On Friday nights we have an organized congregation. The *prasad*, a blessed offering of a sweet paste-like porridge of honey and wheat, is given to the people after the prayers. On Fridays and Sundays a full vegetarian meal is offered to everyone who comes to emphasize the equality of all Sikhs.

Whenever a person comes to pray or a congregation gathers, a hymn will be going on. The scholars explain part

of the hymns. Everything done there is from the hymns written in the holy book. In the gurdwara you are present and you can sing along or flow with your mind or with your voice. You can close your eyes and keep listening. The idea is to do whatever you need to get the peace. I don't go to the gurdwara as an obligation to God, I go because I want to. If I am disturbed or need peace I go there to seek it.

Are women and men together in the gurdwara?

Yes. Usually men sit on one side and the women on the other. Children sit with their mom or dad. The purpose of going to the gurdwara is to go before the holy book. It does not matter if I am a man or a woman.

Women read from the holy book, participate in singing and organizing things at the gurdwara at an equal level or perhaps they do even more. I have not seen a woman as a high priest. I don't know the reason.

You mentioned the scholars. Are they the leaders of the gurdwara? Is there a professional clergy?

Christianity has its organized schools and universities where people can go and seek the profession to be a minister. People who devote themselves to doing everything in the gurdwara, increasing their knowledge, and practicing different instruments like the harmonium (a small reed organ) and tablas (drums) to accompany the hymns, become a kind of priest. Then there are scholars who speak. He or she does not sing or play but lectures and explains the hymns. These are the ones who have devoted their lives to learning the meaning of each word of the hymns.

In what language is your holy book written?

The *Guru Granth Sahib* was written in Gurmuki, but we speak Punjabi in our gurdwara. There are other translations of the holy book available because there are people from other language groups: English, Urdu, Hindi. Many translations are available. Some gurdwaras have computer printouts available in several languages.

One item I want to mention about the holy book is that it is not just written by Sikhs, it contains the writing of at least thirty-six Muslim and Hindu saints. When we bow to the holy book, we don't bow to any particular face. We bow to the teaching of what is written there. We bow to the collective wisdom of saints and gurus who have spent their lives learning and praying. The objective is to obtain knowledge and be a good person.



Dennis N. Symons, Jr.

What are the basic beliefs or ideals you follow?

Guru Nanak was the founder of this religion. He was born into a Hindu family and as he grew a little, he saw so many artificial things that did not lead to understanding God. He said this is not right. We are all human beings. There is no caste system based on color, profession, or country. When he started he said there is only one God. The first word of the holy books says, "There is only one God." The second word is, "and his name is Truth." God has no beginning or end or gender. God is an entity or power. The next word says, "Everything is done by him." The next is, "He is not born." God has no personality and there will be no death.

These are basic words Guru Nanak said. When we go to worship we don't go to worship a face or person, we go to bow to the preaching taught in the holy book.

Our religion started about 500 years ago. The span of the ten gurus teaching was about 200 years; but the scriptures contain hymns and stories from before the time Guru Nanak was born.

The Sikh's face in prayer emanates sincerity and devotion. A saint is someone in tune with God. What he speaks is immaterial though, the way one lives is what is important. The way of sainthood is the degree of obedience one has toward God. Sikhs are householders. We marry and honestly earn a living. This is the way to belong to God. We do not shun the world or believe you have to fast or deny yourself.

The words that Guru Nanak spoke are the basis of humanity. There is only one God. We have different paths, but the same things are emphasized.

How does one become a Sikh?

A Sikh is basically a person of God, one who is obedient to God. Like many religions one is born into it. I am a born Sikh. We do not believe in conversion or trying to coach or convince someone to become a Sikh. Being a Sikh is not easy. We try to devote ourselves to the learning taught to us by our gurus and become a good human being.

If you were to decide you wanted to be a Sikh and you asked me as a neighbor or friend, I would help you to understand the teachings. That is your choice. A lot of people from around the world have become Sikhs.

Is there an initiation rite in Sikhism?

Sikhism baptism is an adult choice. The initiation involves sipping and being sprinkled with *amrit*, sweet water.

When you choose to go through this process, what are the requirements?

After baptism there are mandatory *garbanis*, words from the guru, to be recited before sunrise and before you go to bed. There are five articles of faith we wear. We do not cut our hair and we wear a turban or head covering as a sign of our commitment to higher consciousness and spirituality. We place a small comb in the hair as a symbol of cleanliness, and we wear a metal bracelet to bind us to the truth. We carry a small ceremonial dagger, a *kirpan*, as a reminder to defend the fine line of truth. We wear long traditional underwear as a mark of purity. These are required for an initiated Sikh. The baptised become members of the *Khalsa*, the pure ones, who do not eat meat or use intoxicants, for instance.



Dennis N. Symons, Jr.

Can someone born a Sikh decide not to be a Sikh?

What kind of Sikh would I be if I don't believe and am being forced to be a Sikh?

What about your names? Why do so many Sikhs use the last names of Singh or Kaur?

The names Singh (lion) and Kaur (princess) were given to us by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Gobind Singh very strongly was against any kind of caste system. In order to not be identified with the different caste systems working in Hinduism and Islam, in order to desegregate people, he said every man's name should be Singh. There is no ironsmith, no blacksmith, and so on. If everybody is named

Singh nobody knows who my forefather was or who he talked to. What is important is how I take hold of my life.

You talked about morning and evening prayers for those who are baptized. Are other prayers said on any other particular days?

I say *garbonis* every day, whenever I get a chance. Over a period of years they become memorized. As I travel I listen to audio tapes from the holy book. There is no special recitation of prayers for specific days apart from the holy book.

Is there a process children go through to learn the hymns and prayers?

It's mostly a matter of following the parents' footsteps and going to gurdwara but we do have language classes here. Many people have the holy book at home. In the home you have to devote the entire room to the holy book. There is a proper decor and a ceremony to open the reading each morning and to close the book at the end of the day. There has to be a canopy, a mark of respect over the book.

If someone comes to the gurdwara with a special request, say, a loved one is very ill, how would they pray? Would I come and ask the priest to pray for me? Do I need to pray from the holy book or do I pray with the words in my heart?

You could ask the guru to sing a hymn or you could do it yourself. You can seek the guidance from the holy book yourself or ask him if you need help. The true God will

understand what you are trying to say, even if you don't use words. Prayer is what you sincerely speak from your heart.

Do you come to the gurdwara at times of marriage, death, or other life passages?

In Sikhism we believe everything is being done by God's will. Happiness, sorrow, birth, death, marriage ceremony, naming ceremony, all of these are celebrated here. My father died in 1987 but every year we still have a community food service in his honor. When marriage takes place, it takes place here. There will be people singing hymns. The high priest will lead the special stanzas. The priest reads one hymn and the couple stands up and circles the holy book. Four times they do this and this is the ceremony.

I've read that the Golden Temple in Amritsar is the most holy spot for Sikhs. Are you required to go on pilgrimage?

There is no requirement to go on pilgrimage to the Golden Temple. Many people like to visit but it is not a requirement. The other four holy places are in India but I have not been to them.

What is the best thing about being a Sikh?

My religion believes in equality and freedom. That's what I like about being a Sikh.

Plan Now to Join Us In Princeton for the Second

COMPANIONS ON THE SACRED JOURNEY

Conference June 14, 15, and 16, 2002

Keynote speakers will be:

Dr. Gerald (Jerry) May,

spiritual director, psychiatrist and widely-read author of *Addiction and Grace*, *Care of Mind/Care of Spirit*, and *The Awakened Heart: Opening Yourself to the Love You Need*

and

Joan Borysenko,

a leading authority on women's spirituality and author of best-selling books, *A Woman's Book of Life*, *Minding the Body/Mending the Mind*, *A Woman's Journey to God*, and *Seven Paths to God: The Ways of the Mystic*

PLUS

15 workshops to choose from

AND

the fabulous storyteller, Mary Murphy; the rousing Gospel singer and teacher, Sister Alice Williams; a lovely and inspiring Taize service; a dynamic Shabbat service with Marcia Prager; and

**MUCH
MORE!**

Save the Date! June 14, 15, 16, 2002

Subscribers and attendees at *last* year's conference will receive a brochure, registration form and complete details by the the end of March 2002.

To be added to the list, e-mail us at **heck@sacredjourney.org**. or write to us at 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227.

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COMPANIONS ON THE SACRED JOURNEY



Old Friends

Mary Murphy



It has been written that the journey, not the arrival, matters. On my way to a storytelling performance I witnessed a story that I want to tell.

I was hired to tell stories at an afternoon Valentine's Day Party for the residents of the Hallmark Nursing Home. The nursing home looked very much like a hospital, although it was trying hard not to. There were flower-covered walls and mauve carpets and cozy chintz sofas and chairs. Table lamps produced warm pools of light. The hallway was dotted with very old people slumped in wheelchairs or leaning on walkers.

Mary Murphy is a professional storyteller who will tell Sacred Stories at the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference to be held June 14-16, 2002. More of her stories are available at www.albany.net/~hello/.

The nurses were busy answering call buttons, fluffing pillows, and handing out medication. But one of them paused in mid-flight to point me in the direction of the dining hall where the Valentine's Party was to be held.

As I walked down the corridor, a woman in a wheelchair held out her hand to me. She was dressed up for the party or for a special visitor—or both. She wore a bright red silk blouse, a white skirt, and red stockings that ended in shiny black leather pumps.

I thought she might have mistaken me for someone else, or perhaps she was simply welcoming a stranger. In any case, I took her offered hand and held it in my own. We stayed that way—connected by our right hands—for a long minute. I told her my name. I asked her if she was coming to the party. She was looking at me intently, her brows pulled together as though she were about to tell me something important—something she needed to say. She began to move her mouth, forming words very precisely with her lips—but no sound came out. I bent closer, thinking she might be whispering, but there was just nothing. It seemed like she was pretending to speak. Or that a ventriloquist who was supposed to provide the voice had missed his cue and she'd started without him.

We were still holding hands. Several yards down the corridor I saw the entrance to the dining hall. Red and white streamers with balloons attached were hanging from the top of the doorway.

The dining hall was calling to me—that's where I was supposed to be. But I couldn't go there. This woman and I weren't finished yet. I knelt down, trying to get close enough to help her find the words that would release me from her grasp. Her struggle had grown more desperate and a noise finally had come up from her throat. It had

sounded like “ack, ack.” “Ack, ack,” she squawked over and over again. And when she heard the noise, she sobbed. Her tears began to create a path through the caked rouge on her cheeks.

Her hand felt warm and dry and powdery in mine. When I knelt down, I’d caught a lavender scent. Her grip was no stronger than a child’s. I could have pulled away at any time, but it wasn’t in me to let go of someone who was drowning in her own unspoken words.

Suddenly, another woman, pulling hard on the wheels of her own chair, slid up beside us. At once the new woman took the red-bloused woman’s left hand. I still



skjoldphotographs.com

had the right. "No, Inez. No, no, honey," she said, "This ain't your daughter. It ain't Lucy. She don't even look like Lucy." Inez sounded a desperate "ack ack" at the newcomer, who eyed me with disapproval. "I know, I know," she said, "Lucy'll be here. She'll come when she can."

This other woman, Clara, I found out, was quite different from Inez. She had no make-up on her wide face. Her hair was yellowish white and her gray sweatshirt was covered with stains. She spoke sharply to me, "I'll look after her. You go on about your business. Shoo!" As though I had somehow tricked Inez into holding hands with me in the first place.

Inez, distracted by Clara, relaxed her grip on my hand. I began to walk toward the dining hall where, in the distance, I saw that the young, professionally cheerful activities director, Marie, had lost some of her cheer. She still hadn't seen me so she stood among the red and white balloons looking at her watch and biting her lipstick off. Behind me I heard Clara talking, almost cooing, softly to Inez. She was telling her about a cardinal she'd seen from her window that morning. A red bird for St. Valentine's Day. Inez's frantic noises had grown calmer. Clara seemed to know the exact meaning of each "ack ack." These sounds of love floated down the corridor and followed me to where my microphone and water glass were waiting. It was time for the party to begin.

William James wrote on a certain blindness in human beings. There is also a certain "sight" and a certain "listening" in human beings that often catches us by surprise. Blessed are the seer and the seen, the hearer and the heard.

P R A Y E R S



O Lord, while I am asleep,
my heart will still be awake and worshipping you;
Permeate my sleep by your presence,
while the whole of creation keeps watch over me,
singing with the angels,
and catching up my soul in its song of praise.

~Gregory of Nazianzus

Only if you lead me, Lord, can I join in the dance. If you want me to, I can leap for joy, but first, you must dance and sing yourself, to show me how to dance and sing with you. Together with you, I will dance towards love; from love I will dance toward truth, and from truth, I will dance toward joy. After that I shall dance beyond all human senses. I will stay there and dance forever.

~Mechtild of Madgeburg

O great chief, light a candle in my heart, that I may see what is in it, and sweep the rubbish from your dwelling place.

~An African schoolgirl

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SPIRITUALITY & HEALING



The Saint of Bravo-Charlie

Joseph A. Burkart

In the winter of 1968, I was in the Charleston Naval Hospital. I had a minor ankle problem needing treatment before I could be discharged from the Navy. I found myself in Bravo-Charlie ward, a large barracks which housed about eighty men, all of whom had been returned home by medevac from Vietnam with hideous burns, lost limbs, shrapnel injuries and, of course, the inevitable deep wounds of psyche and soul.

The morning after I arrived, I awoke to one of the most beautiful sounds I've ever heard the human voice produce. In that state in between sleep and consciousness, I glanced down the long aisle in the middle of the room to glimpse a large black woman, mop and bucket in hand, strolling down the corridor singing, "Precious Lord, hold my hand, lead me on, help me stand."

As she cleaned and tidied up, she would pause to sit on the end of a broken soldier's bed. There would be a brief interchange, the grasping of hands, occasionally a hug. As she came closer, I noticed that after she left the side of the men, some would have tears in their eyes, others would

Joseph "Tony" Burkart is a psychotherapist in private practice. He's engaged in what he calls "contemplative psychotherapy" and splits his time between his practice and the joy of teaching. A Roman Catholic lay person and Camaldolese Benedictine Oblate, he lives with his wife and son on a small farm on the coast of Maine.

be smiling, or there would be uproarious laughter. The eagerness and enthusiasm of each man in the ward to have this cleaning woman visit his bedside was powerfully obvious. The hymn continued as she swung her mop and dust brush and moved amidst the long row of anguished and disfigured humanity in Bravo-Charlie. For the three days I resided on that ward, this routine repeated itself.

When it was time for me to leave the ward, I asked the doctor signing my discharge papers who this woman was. He mentioned that her name was Mama Lee. She had worked in housekeeping for some ten years at the hospital. She never spoke about herself much. The few conversations he had been privileged to have with her revealed a broken marriage, the death of a daughter, the overt racial prejudice of the South. But what overshadowed all of this was the joy she encountered in those life experiences where the visceral contact of God's mercy was lived out and was not just theory.

She was able to see the beauty life can contain and to maintain her faith in the benevolent goodness of God and hold fast to her love for people. "She was never very specific," the doctor said. "She simply continues on with her chores and, more powerfully, with her compassion. No one on the staff has the healing power Mama Lee wields."

Thomas Merton said, "We are all called to be saints." Perhaps he is right. For the kingdom of God to come alive in the human heart is all of our inheritance. And was it not William Blake who claimed that "We are given a little time on earth to learn to bear the beams of love?"

In the ancient Hasidic tradition of the *Lamid Vav*, in every generation there are twelve women and men whose lives transform the human heart. Yet these very ones never know who they are for if they were conscious of their life

and activity in the world, they would not do what they do with such purity and power.

I know in my bones that my brief encounter with Mama Lee was one of the few times in my life when I truly found myself in the presence of holiness and a transformed heart. Yet I am equally sure that Mama Lee would be embarrassed or explode in a belly laugh at such a prospect. She would be the last one to think in such terms.



Abraham Menashe

ILLUMINATIONS



It is always the oppressor, not the oppressed who dictates the form of the struggle.

~Nelson Mandela

When the forgetful man gets up in the morning, he reflects on what he is going to do, whereas the intelligent man sees what God is doing with him.

~'Ibn (Ata) Illah, 13th

Century Egyptian Sufi

We must love them both—
those whose opinions we share,
those whose opinions we don't share.
They've both labored in the search for truth
and have helped us in finding it.

~Thomas Aquinas

Returning violence for violence only multiplies violence, adding a deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness can not drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate can not drive out hate; only love can do that.

~Martin Luther King, Jr.

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE



My Friend Talks to Angels

Nancy Scott

I first met David at a writers' group at our local bookstore. I almost hadn't shown up that night—afraid my writing wasn't good enough, afraid of taking taxis at night, afraid my blindness would make other writers uneasy. David offered me a ride home.



It was the first of many kindnesses. He took me to writers' group meetings, to plays, and to poetry readings. He gently, but firmly, pulled me out of my house and about a year later, onto a stage where I read my poetry for the first time to an audience. Because of that intervention, my identity as a poet has now been established.

By then, I knew that David's support was more than a coincidence. Too often, he was at the end of a phone

Nancy Scott has twice been awarded first place in the National Federation of the Blind Writer's Division poetry contests. In 1994, she received a Center for Independent Living Grant to produce and market a cassette series of disability resources. When not writing, Nancy serves on the board of directors and as program chair for her local Radio Reading Service, parliamentarian for the local AMVETS Auxiliary, and member of the Center for Independent Living Arts and Disability group. She also performs as singer-pianist for various organizations near her home in Easton, Pennsylvania.

line when I needed someone most. Too often, his persuasion turned out to be essential to my writing career. But I didn't know how he knew so much till this past August.

I was suffering from an ear infection that seriously damaged the hearing in my right ear. For almost two weeks my balance was off, the pitch of music (which I love) was distorted and painful, my directional hearing (upon which I depend as a blind person) was mostly gone,

*David's
support
was more
than
coincidence.*

and I was tired all the time. I had followed both doctor's instructions and healthy folk wisdom, but, by the second Sunday, things were worse than ever. I was too dizzy to go to church and I was really getting scared. What if this became permanent? What if it invaded my left ear?

About the time I had worked myself into a true panic, the phone rang. It was David, calling, as he had several times, to see how I was doing. We talked about how long it was taking for my health to show any improvement. And David said, "An angel just told me that tomorrow you'll be better."

As soon as he said the words, I knew it would be true. The next morning, I woke to lots of crackling and an ear-popping release of pressure. Getting full hearing back took a few days, but I knew that, because I had been sent a friend who talks to angels, I would be fine.

PILGRIMAGE



Morocco Journal

David P. Prescott

My wife, Peggy, and I joined with sixty-eight other Christians, Jews, and Muslims for an inter-religious conversation and travel through Morocco.

The evening before our departure for Casablanca, the group met for dinner and thereafter broke into small groups to talk about why we were there.



Threads from my small group—and indeed every other small group—were common: spiritual search, open to discovery, varied backgrounds, mutual connections, membership in a religious community. These travelers were well educated, represented various shades of their religious traditions, were outspoken and self-confident.

Geographically, Morocco is the Western-most outpost of the Islamic world. The country lies physically to the west of all of Europe and of England. The Islamic world spreads east to Indonesia, the largest Muslim nation with 220 million followers. There are Muslim minorities in China

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and India. Some Muslims use Islam to legitimize political power, recently so well-illustrated by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Even in Morocco, the only remaining monarchy in North Africa, the king claims to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, which legitimizes his rule as political leader as he is also the “commander of the faithful” of the nation.

Morocco, we were told, is a very traditional and conservative society. Because of the history of colonialism (the French left in 1956) and its contacts with the West, it has become a land of many conflicts as the traditional and the modern have met. For example, the current king—

*Morocco
to my
eye is a
nation of
tensions.*

Mohammed VI—has tried to find a balance between modernity and the traditional life of the nation. He has been king since July, 1999, having succeeded his very popular father. A somewhat enigmatic figure, the king’s bent toward modernizing has given rise to a movement of Islamacists (we would call

them “fundamentalists”) who decry the influences of Western Europe on the traditional life of the people. The King sees modernization as a way of raising the living standards of the people; his opponents see the consumerism and moral decay of the West as a threat to Islam.

Morocco to my eye is a nation of tensions. There are vast differences between rich and poor; between the cities and villages; between the literate and illiterate. Morocco is the poorest nation in North Africa in terms of per capita income. Unemployment hovers at 40% as does the percentage of school age children who do not attend school regularly. The illiteracy rate is 55%; 80% among women. It has a variety of ethnic and language groups. While not an Islamic state, it is overwhelmingly Muslim, and, indeed, many attend to ritual

prayers and other Islamic practices. Public life and private life are separate domains; what one does in the public space is very different from what one does at home. There are evident divisions between men and women, both in terms of behavior and expectations. Contact with the West has brought much of this traditional behavior into question and hence there are strong divisions within the society, even within families.

That Morocco is a land of contrasts became evident on our way to Fez. On the same overpass over a modern divided highway, one would see both Mercedes delivery trucks and donkey-drawn carts carrying produce to market. One farmer would be cultivating a field with a hand-held hoe, another with a burro and plow and a third with a gasoline-powered tractor, although the latter was very rare. Both men and women worked on the land.

Near Casablanca, the countryside seemed barren, but as we got closer to Mecknes and Fez, the land was lush with olive trees, old and newly planted, grapes, onions, squash, corn, eucalyptus and cedar trees, yucca and flowering prickly pear in hedgerows. Sheep, cattle, goats and a few donkeys grazed on the land. Now and again the rolling lush landscape would be punctuated by fields of yellow/white limestone, glowing under the high sun. Country vistas are unbroken by power lines, while satellite dishes are in abundance in the cities and some of the more prosperous villages that have electricity.

Fez, our first stop, is located inland on the Sasse plain toward the Taza Gap, a narrow pass between the Rif and Middle Atlas Mountains, an historical invasion route from the East.

We toured Fez el Bali, the oldest section, on a Saturday morning. What an experience! The city is a series of rabbit warrens, impossible to tell from one another. There are

no signs and the streets and alleys, most no more than twenty feet wide at the widest, were teeming with people. The streets were so crowded that it was hard to keep several people together in a group, let alone keep up with the entire busload of our party. Ambient street noise was punctuated with cries of *bellek, bellek*, meaning “watch out” as a man with a donkey loaded with goods for a shop or market trotted hastily along the street. The streets were, in many places, not wide enough for two burdened donkeys to pass one another. The sense of being clustered together is intensified by the heavy walls of two and three story buildings which form the interior streets of the medina. Despite the high heat of the Moroccan morning, the medina was cool. Attractive canopies cover much of it, some made entirely of plants. The winding narrow streets, going up hill and down, make Fez el Bali impossible for a visitor to navigate without a guide.

The shops were stalls, large enough for one or two proprietors to dispense the ample goods on display. Stalls selling fresh fish yielded to stalls with fruits and vegetables. We admired the freshly harvested onions, golf ball sized artichokes, berries, cherries, apples, oranges, breads, pastries, sweets, herbs and spices, goat and lamb and beef parts (external and internal) hanging from hooks or otherwise on display in the open air, fabrics and clothing, shoes and electronics.

We wandered as tourists, careful not to lose sight of our guide for fear of never finding our way out while residents and knowledgeable shoppers made their way purposefully to the places they wanted to go. We visited an area of woodworkers, of tinsmiths and of weavers. Our impression was that the practice of their crafts was done as in the West hundreds of years ago. We saw yarn spun by



David P. Prescott

hand, cloth and carpet weavers using foot treadles and wooden shuttles. Metal crafts—copper, tin, brass and silver—are done by hand. One woodworker used his bare feet to control a lathe.

Every neighborhood has a school, a bakery and a mosque. The latter is restricted in Morocco to Muslims only. Sounds of children reciting verses from the Qur'an were heard near one school. The Qur'an is taught in every school, even though the educational system is run by the government. Separation of church and state, so fundamental a concept in our American democracy, is a foreign concept in Morocco where the teachings of the Qur'an are so much interwoven into the fabric of the society and culture.

The neighborhood bakery is an important place. In each city, we saw women or children carrying two loaves of flat Moroccan bread on a board covered by cloths to the bakery for baking. Similarly, we saw women or children returning from the bakery with the hot bread. Each baker has a special mark for the loaves of a particular family so the loaves do not get mixed up. Small loaves of tasty fresh-baked bread can be bought for a few dirham, which several of our party had a habit of doing as a snack along the way.

Fez el Bali has a population, we were told, of some 450,000, a statistic that is hard to believe, given how small it seems. At one time, there was a Jewish section in the medina, but that is largely gone, with the total city Jewish population down to a couple of hundred from about 15,000. As in other places in Morocco, Jews left in large numbers after the declaration of Israeli independence in 1948, and then again after the 1967 war. Many Jews, we were told, felt uncomfortable living with Arab neighbors, given the conflict between Arabs and Jews in other parts of the world. Others left for economic reasons, believing that they could find better opportunity in Israel.

The decline of the nation's Jewish population is in spite of the fact that Morocco has a long history of influential Jewish culture and political presence. Jews first migrated to Morocco after the destruction of the temple in 79 C.E. Two significant migrations followed, one in the 800s and another in 1492, when the Jews and Moors were expelled from Spain. Jews were integral to the commercial and governmental life of the country from the earliest days. In times of difficulties, the government has traditionally protected Jews. In fact, during German control of North Africa during World War II, the Moroccan king refused Nazi demands for the deportation of Moroccan Jews.

We visited a large Jewish cemetery outside of the walls of the city. This extensive burial ground is proof of the existence of a once large Jewish population. The names of many Jewish sages appeared on grave markers. One of our group asked that we say the

Kaddish together in memory of a loved one who died during the last year, a moving inter-religious experience. Another found the names of family members among the dead.

Members of our group met a British-educated architect who, with his English family, had returned to Fez. His analysis of the tensions in Moroccan society confirmed the observations we heard at our pre-travel briefing. He regarded the tension between modernization and isolation as the most significant. Islamacists (fundamentalists) seek to restrain the king from too rapidly modernizing the nation and entering into the global economy. These efforts are seen as the equivalent to Westernizing, which is anathema to those seeking a more rigorous Islamic practice. Our host was

During World War II, the king refused Nazi demands for the deportation of Moroccan Jews.

particularly concerned that globalization would bring Western consumerism with it, destroying the Moroccan artisan's way of life. On the other hand, as a Western-educated person, he knows the benefits of modernization in terms of education, healthcare and job opportunities.

Strains occur within the strong Islamic family tradition. Often several generations live under the same roof, with older ones favoring a more traditional lifestyle and younger ones more eager to embrace the modern. This difference was manifest in many places, where mothers dressed in traditional garb with veiled faces walked on the streets with daughters whose heads and faces were uncovered and who wore stylish but tasteful Western dress. In Casablanca, we noted that cell phones were common among both men and women, another concession to the modern.

Feminism is a complex issue in Morocco. While women's roles are changing, they are doing so within a culture of strict rules on a woman's family role in this traditional society. The architect's English wife pointed out that more and more women were working outside of the home, especially because unemployment among men is so high. This fact is inconsistent with the *sharia*, religious law, which says that the male is to be the provider and the wife is to take care of the home.

The issue of feminism is further complicated by that of language. We had the privilege of hearing from a well-known Moroccan feminist. In the discussion following her talk, we learned that she wrote all of her works in classical Arabic. When asked why she did not write in the Moroccan vernacular, she stated that, first, she would get no respect for such work from the academic community, and second, that since eighty percent of Moroccan women were illiterate, writing in the language they speak would not effectively disseminate her views.

Most of us had no idea of the language complexity of the country, where classical Arabic is used for academic writing and for official government administrative matters and Moroccan Arabic is the commonly spoken language along with a variety of Berber dialects, none of which has a written expression. Beyond that, the legacy of the French is evident in the way in which business is done as French is the language of international commerce in the country.

Some of the differences between the Muslims in our group emerged one evening as the conservative Muslims refused to attend an Andalusian dinner with music and dancing. Many avoided any function where there was dancing, partially clad women, where liquor was served or where any music other than religious music was played. Some were offended if a non-Muslim at the dinner table ordered a glass of wine. These Muslims simply stayed together to themselves during most of the trip. The objection to hearing music other than sacred music caused some strains on one of the busses where others wanted to listen to taped Moroccan music offered by the driver over the bus speaker system. One Muslim, who wore a tee shirt with Martin Luther King's likeness, told me that other Muslims in the group called him a heretic for wearing the likeness of a living creature on his clothing. These stark differences among the Muslims on our trip were instructive. While we often think of Islam as a monolithic religion, in fact, it is no more monolithic than Christianity.

*Islam is not
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There are
multiple
traditions.*

To be a Muslim, one must meet five conditions. First, one must declare with sincerity and with the intent of becoming a Muslim that "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad



David P. Prescott

is his messenger.” Second, one adopts the practice of praying five times a day—at daybreak, at noon, at mid-afternoon, in the evening and just after dark. Sufi mystics do not always follow this prayer practice. Third, one must give alms to the poor. Charitable acts represent both an outward expression and an inward attitude. Fourth, one must, if circumstances allow, make a journey to Mecca once during one’s life. Finally, one must observe the fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

Within Islam, there are several traditions: Sunni, Shiite and Sufi, the latter being a mystical tradition. Muslim congregations are led by a local imam. There is no hierarchy as in the Catholic churches.

Many Muslims do not have the financial wherewithal to make the Haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and thus they seek to visit nearer holy sites instead. One is Moulay Isdris, the fourth

most holy shrine in Islam after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. Moulay Isdris, which we visited on our departure from Fez, is built into a steep, high hill. After entering this small town, we walked hundreds of steps down the winding stone stairs leading to the shrine. As non-Muslims, we were not allowed to enter the mosque, but did get to walk into the antechamber briefly. As in most mosques, there were separate prayer chambers for men and women.

Moulay Isdris overlooks the plain on which the extensive Roman city of Volubolis was built. The stunning remains, found on a softly rising hill in the valley, include wonderful arches, sturdy foundation walls and colorful mosaic tile floors, which have lasted in relatively good condition over the centuries despite heat, rain and penetrating sunshine. Volubolis had been the Roman capital of the area, occupied at one time by some 20,000 people. Much of the building material for Moulay Isdris had been recycled from Volubolis.

Muslims claim a dependence on God that most Westerners do not. Frequently heard is the phrase *Inshallah*, which means "if God wills." "We will gather in the morning, *Inshallah*." Also, the centrality of God is combined with a negation of self. When one uses the word "I," it is followed by "may God forgive me." As a mark of respect, an Arab will not look another person directly in the eye. In fact, there is a superstition that one can be given bad fortune by another's look with "the evil eye." Many doors in Morocco have a representation of the hand of Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, to ward off the effects of the evil eye.

Ibrahim Abu Rabi, one of our leaders, a Palestinian Muslim originally from Israel, pointed out that the roots of Islam and Judaism are very close. He also mentioned that Western scholarship has looked more critically at the Jewish and Christian traditions than Muslim scholars have looked at

Islam. He attributes the difference to the freedom from political threats inherent in the church/state separation of the West.

Our next major stop after Fez was Rabat, the capital city of Morocco. Rabat, as one might expect, is a modern city. We holed up at the Safir Hotel, which had a refreshing roof-top pool. A quick swim was very much welcome after a tedious, hot bus ride. That evening I met a Lebanese businessman in the elevator. We chatted about why each of us was in Rabat. When I told him about our group, he observed that the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions were so close (holding

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his first finger and thumb together with just a sliver of light between them), that he could not understand why they could not get along in the Middle East.

The following day took us to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Surrounded by a number of solicitous aides, the minister explained that all of the mosques and Qur'anic schools in the nation were owned and overseen by the ministry, that all of the imams were paid by the ministry and that the ministry was responsible for their theological education. Despite this government oversight, he said that imams were free to teach and preach as they chose, but did acknowledge that information from the king was sometimes disseminated through the imams. Later, we visited a Roman Catholic Church. Because we were late, the priest refused to see us so we were left to our own devices. One of the Roman Catholics in the group explained much of the symbolism in the sanctuary, which the non-Christians found enlightening. Officially, Christians and Jews are free to practice their respective religions. As a practical matter, there are few Christians in Morocco. Christianity is equated with

colonialism. In addition to the one Catholic Church we found in Rabat, we heard from one evangelical Protestant minister, who had been in the country only about six months. He knew little of the culture of Morocco, but claimed that there was severe prejudice against Christians and those seeking to promulgate the faith, mostly evident through denial of needed permits. He also said that prostitution was a major problem because of the way women were treated and that many of those he served were visitors from sub-Saharan Africa seeking illegal entry into Europe.

That night at the hotel, the group had a haltingly and polite conversation about our religious similarities and differences. Three conclusions arose. First, Jews, Christians, and Muslims know little about each other's traditions, practices, doctrines, and beliefs. Second, differences within each tradition are largely unexplored. While often outsiders view another religion as monolithic, that is far from the truth. Finally, dialogue requires much more listening than most of us are used to doing.

I realized as a result of this trip that I am a Christian by accident of birth. Had I not been born an American of Protestant parents, I might be a Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist or pantheist, for that matter. Religious heritage is largely determined by place of birth, religion of parents, and the culture into which one is born. Consequently, I can not say that my religious tradition is better or worse than the traditions of those with whom I traveled and those whom I met. They also are Christians, Jews, and Muslims largely by accident of birth. I also saw that there is much to learn from other traditions; that Christians have much in common with Jews and Muslims and that claims of Christian exclusivity stand in the way of exploring our commonality. At the same time I affirm the legitimacy of other faith traditions, I affirm the legitimacy of my own.

A LIVING FLAME OF LOVE



Garnette Arledge

Let yourself be silently drawn/by the
stronger pull of what you really love

~Rumi

Even now in my imagination, I recall last winter as frigid. Yet on February 17-18, the opportunity to explore "The Power of Meditation" in a weekend workshop with Pir Vilayat Khan warmed my heart. Pir means teacher and is his title. No matter my blood seemed to turn to ice when I stepped outside of my car near 30th Street between Madison and Lexington close to the Interfaith Center of New York. Gladly I braved the cold for a first experience of the mystical teachings of the Sufi Order.

Pir is a wiry, erect and bronzed man who, even at 85, seems ever-ready to hike through the Indian jungle, scale the Himalayas, or travel up Mt. Athos in a basket as in his youth. He spoke seamlessly, talking without notes during a two-day workshop on meditation and the world's great religions. If indeed love is the magical trigger that sets off the explosion of life in the cosmos, it remains the mysterious imperative spurring our endeavors.

Again and again over the two days, Pir Vilayat returned

Garnette Arledge, M.Div., for thirty years has been fascinated with the wellspring of creativity and the inner life. She is a spiritual director and active in wellness and death education. She lives in Morristown, New Jersey.

to the imperative of love as he synthesized the spiritual practices of Buddhist bikku, Muslim dervish, Hindu rishi, and Christian monk. Pir said, "We must ask ourselves what is the spirituality of the future by examining that of the past." Born in 1916 in London, Pir speaks precise English with an Anglo-Franco intonation. His teaching style is conversational and intimate.

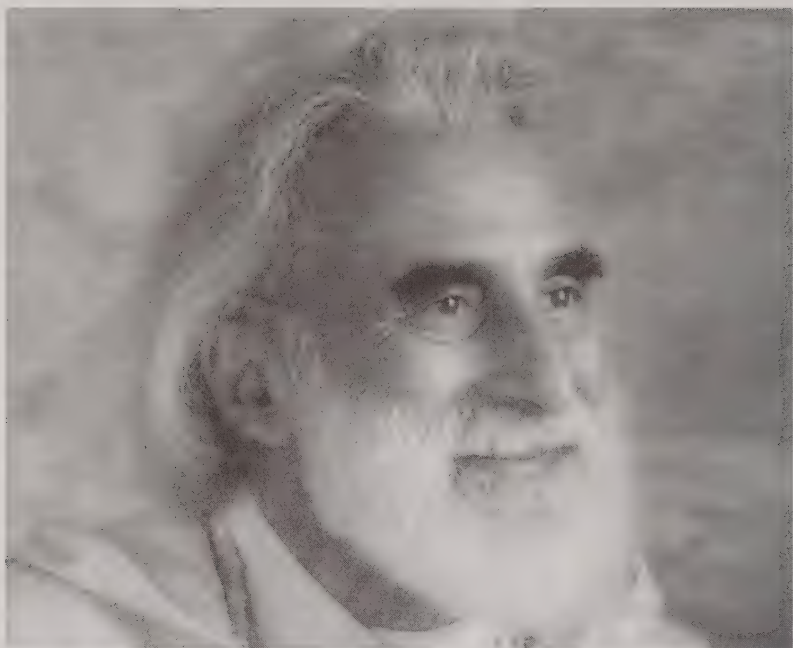
I found it so helpful to hear the leader of a specific faith tradition talk about the beauty of other traditions. His clarity and lifelong study of the world's great religions helped me put my own belief system in perspective.

Pir was precise in separating Sufi beliefs from the other faith traditions he illustrated. Each tradition included a musical selection, brief biography, and imaginative application for meditation. The weekend teachings culminated with Pir's own father, founder of modern Sufism, Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Kahn. Due to lack of space, my report features Pir's teachings on Christianity.

On Sunday, the workshop's final day, as the last notes of Gabrielli's Mass recorded in San Marco, Venice, faded into silence, Pir leaned forward, placing his hand on the teak table before him adorned with an arrangement of scarlet roses: "Imagine you have had a day of ostracism, demeaning you. You are very upset. You try to sleep, when at 3 A.M., the doorbell rings. A great light is at the door. From the light, you hear, 'Forgive them.'

"Then you hear, 'All are suffering in the world due to resentment. Start with you. Let it go.'"

As Pir led the visualization practice, I felt a great light and warmth in my heart. He continued, "The Christ was not angry with the Herodian soldiers torturing him, instead he merged into their consciousness. He knew them, their sorrows and pains. He had compassion for them."



Sufi Order of the West

With this profound understanding of the basic Christian teachings, I recognized Pir had wisdom to share of my own tradition. Gladly, I listened with an open mind. Then he said: "I am going to share with you a meditation technique I was given at Mt. Athos in Greece by a *staret*, a holy person. If you are Christian, you may kneel to practice this:

Say Kyrie (God) with your head bowed towards your chest, for guilt at the pain you caused others.

Say Eleison (Have mercy on me) with your head tilted back, for the pain you caused yourself.

Say Christi (Anointed One) with your head bowed for the resentment and hurt you caused others.

This practice awakens conscience, instead of consciousness, by touching upon the most

important issues of those who are floundering in life, broken by their lives, those suffering in the dark night of the soul. Those filled with resentment at their lot in life.

As his biographical illustration from the Christian tradition, Pir chose to recount the life of St. John of the Cross, author of *The Dark Night of the Soul*. Pir related, that John, “lived at a time (1542-1591) of great conflicts in the Spanish church between the mitigated monks, who were lukewarm monastics with comforts, and the Discalced or barefoot monks, who were viewed as extreme ascetics, as they were very hard on themselves. Armed conflict broke out between them.” Pir’s white eyebrows arched with humor to be sure we understood the concept that monks were fighting each other.

“John was captured, imprisoned in a lightless 6x10 foot broom closet for months in Salamanca. Only once a day he was let out of the dark, and then briefly. Eventually after months of this regime, he escaped the darkness. His whole teaching gravitates around that escape because of the darkness.”

Pir paused, his remarkable dark eyes luminous as he glanced to one then another in the room. His look was tender, soft. He said:

Understand first that for John, the Light was so intense that light was darkness. Secondly, to John there comes a time when there is no light at all, say in spiritual anxiety or mental breakdown or imprisonment. [There is] no light at all except a spark. This is the time of no faith. But to John of the Cross things make sense that don’t seem to make sense. He believed that faith is not possible through ordinary reason but through

conviction. This understanding that the senses can be tranquilized, with no guide except within, transformed John from a mundane to a holy person.

Thus, John turned the seeming despair of degrading incarceration into an opportunity to experience more profoundly the love of God.

Pir paused, deliberately looked around the gathering: "Getting into the consciousness of Christ supports our faith no matter how or where we suffer. John wrote, 'This faith may be faint, but it can grow to a bright flame of love because in the depths of our being rests the sacred.'"

Continuing he said, "However in sum, Christian saints, monks, ascetics renounce feeling, reducing themselves to a two-word mantra. I believe this is dangerous, from the Sufi point of view, because it limits imagination. But to John surrendering to that which is distasteful, such as extreme suffering, and accepting that suffering led to bliss. Faith transformed him, nothing else in the world could do it."

Pir reached for his walking stick and stood: "St. John throws new light on loving God. For instead of his loving God, he let 'The Living Flame of Love' love him."

As he walked out, he apologized for "going beyond the time, I couldn't stop."

Pir achieved in his two-day tour de force a remarkable weaving of the world's great religions. With affectionate emphasis on underlying yearning for Divine Love, as this theme weaves itself through world religions, he fired our imaginations. He left us with a thirst to explore more deeply interfaith practices, and ennobled the heart to love beyond dogmas.

O living flame of love
that tenderly wounds my soul
in its deepest center! Since
now you are not oppressive,
now consummate! If it be your will
tear through the veil of this encounter

O sweet cautery,
O delightful wound! O gentle hand! O delicate touch
that tastes of eternal life
and pays every debt!
In killing you changed death to life.

O lamps of fire!
In whose splendors
the deep caverns of feeling,
once obscure and blind,
now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

How gently and lovingly
you wake in my heart,
where in secret you dwell alone; and in your sweet breathing,
filled with good and glory,
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.

~St. John of the Cross

P O E T R Y



Lenten Confession

Fredrick Zydek

I want to be a place
where praise is washed
in an embrace of words,
a song-singing believer
in whose hands black beads
blaze white as the sun.

I want to be a chalice,
a place where good red
wine declares its mystery.
I want to be like Mary
and the moon, to reflect
light not just of my own making.

I want to lift my arms
and shout loud amens
each time I remember
how the bones of the Saints
inspire anthems and the small
doves that lift them to the stars.

Fredrick Zydek has published four collections of poetry and has published more than 800 essays, plays, poems and reviews in The Antioch Review, Christianity Today, Christianity and Literature, New England Review and many other publications. He also directs The Unity Center for Oneness Reading Series in Omaha, Nebraska.

But more often than not
I'm but a wind whistling through
salvation's window, life caught
picking its toes. I'm what often
happens when the soul's smile
is no proof of innocence.

Tracks and Traces

Thomas More

*"His presence can be felt as spirit-
energy in the mystery of the earth."*

Hannah Green, *Little Saint*

You know the open byways and hidden lanes
Of my heart.
And when You come you bring no maps with You
As You walk the route you know so well
At all Your comings.
And at Your partings
You leave tracks
Which I trace
Down the open byways and hidden lanes
Until you come again.

Brother Thomas More is retired, having previously been the Director of The Franciscan Renewal Center, Santa Barbara, CA, for ten years. Brother More has contributed to this publication over the years.

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